



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

**TESTIMONY ON 19-H 6043,
RELATING TO CRUELTY TO PUBLIC SAFETY DOGS
May 7, 2019**

The ACLU of Rhode Island appreciates the intent of this bill, but we are concerned about the increase in penalties that it contains for people who engage in certain contact with police dogs, police horses, etc.

Presently, it is a misdemeanor carrying a one year penalty to strike or otherwise mistreat a police animal. This bill would expand the law to sentence a person to one year in prison merely for, among other things, maliciously “touching” or “teasing” one of these animals. We believe the imposition of criminal penalties for such conduct is inappropriate. Police animals should not be teased, but that doesn’t mean that it should be turned into a crime.

The bill would also establish five-year felony penalties for serious mistreatment of these animals, replacing current misdemeanor penalties for that conduct and supplementing current penalties in the law for animal cruelty.

For some time, the ACLU has been raising concerns about the many laws the General Assembly passes each year, criminalizing new activity and increasing sentencing for activity already criminal. In the past year, we have issued two reports documenting the adverse fiscal, social and policy impact of the continued passage of legislation increasing prison sentences for crimes without any underlying evidence-based rationale. Without in any way minimizing the intent behind this legislation, we urge the committee to examine the information contained in those reports before passing this or similar legislation.